SUNDAY SERMON

A Scholarly Discourse by Dr. C. Edward Locke.

Brooklyn, N. Y.—Dr. Charles Edward Locke, in the Hanson Place M. E. Church Sunday, preached on "Popular Desecration of Sacred Vessels; or, The Sin of Irreverence." The text was from II Samuel 6:6-7: "Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it; and God smote him there for his error." Dr. Locke said in the course of his sermon:

There is danger that our greatest national sin shall be the sin of irreverence. The ancient story of Uzzah's act of desecration in placing his hand upon the holy ark of God is full of serious and important lessons which apply with solemn significance to our age, and our country and our individual citizenship.

God had given commandment to Moses to construct a sacred vessel to be overlaid within and without with pure gold. It was to be surmounted with two cherubim of beaten gold. This casket was to be a receptacle for the Tables of Stone which Moses had received on the mount of Sinai, and it a beautiful ark was to be an altar of prayer which was to be kept in the midst of the people, for God said, "There will I meet with them." God explicitly commanded that no hand should touch the ark save the priests' and rings and poles were provided by which this sacred vessel was to be carried.

The Philistines came up against Israel and captured the ark and held it a captive for sixty years. When at last it conquered Philistia and builded a suitable place for the ark, and, with 30,000 warriors, went down to the borders of the enemy's country and secured possession of the precious treasure. In the acclamation and joyousness of this long looked for victory, Uzzah's mortal sin of irreverence was wrought, which cost him his life.

In the days of prosperity, irreverence grows most insidiously. When men feel secure in their own successes they are prone to forget the commands of God. We do not depend so helplessly on our Heavenly Father when our achievements have given us great confidence in our own personal and individual prosperity are at once our greatest danger and greatest security. In the frenzy of victory, as did Uzzah, we do we often commit acts of irreverence.

Sometimes it is fashionable to be irreverent. The Hebrew people, in transporting the ark, had placed it upon an ox cart, and when the Israelites captured the ark they followed the custom of the Philistines and were returning with the ark drawn by a cart. Nowadays, of carrying the ark of the saves and rings as of God had personified property and power. One act of irreverence leads to another. And when the ark was drawn by the cart went over Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah heedlessly committed his serious offense. When the church is down the world to see it is fashionable, careless, dissonant and unspiritual.

Two other fruitful causes of irreverence are forgetfulness and familiarity. The ark had been in Uzzah's house since his boyhood and he dared to take privileges with the sacred furniture. Familiarity sometimes breeds contempt. It is a sad but undeniable that Uzzah was either malicious or wicked, but he was heedless, and even so spiritual blindness sin a heedlessness has brought upon him the awful penalty for his disobedience. The influence of sacred things depends upon their sacredness being preserved. God could not control Israel without their reverence and obedience. Irreverence destroys the sacredness. Sin is more the suffering of than irreverence. It decays its victims. It is like dry rot in the ship's timbers. Irreverence slyly gains admittance where gross sin would be easily repulsed. Satan is constantly busy trying to transform the sons of God into devil, who serve at holy altars, into the sons of men. He is the deceptive tendencies of familiarity; when distance respect for holy things is lost, then desecrament and sacrilege easily creep in. When reverence departs character cannot be retained, for character is grounded upon faith and in obedience to sacred things.

At Belshazzar's feast, in the supposed impregnable city of Babylon, it was the towering crime of irreverence. In defiling the sacred vessels of the temple worship at Jerusalem brought disaster and death to the disobedient and impious monarch. What irreverence of the holy things to-day which must be honored and preserved!

The church is a sacred vessel. Created to the glory of God, it should not be diverted into secular uses, nor should the merchants be cast out of the courts of the temple, and, of course, the house is given no permission granted for their return. The sons of Aaron were consumed by the strange fire which they undertook to offer as a sacrifice to the Lord. And similar results occur today in the consuming of holy instincts and respectful inclinations, when the church of God is made a mere place of amusement and merchandising. In the chapels and parish houses many things are proper which in the sanctuary would be inadmissible by irreverence.

The Bible is a most sacred vessel. There is not much danger of bibliolatry, but we need to be on much on our guard lest the very availability of our Great Book shall cause it to be less appreciated. Things are often valued by use in proportion to the sacrifice which has been suffered. A gentleman purchased a copy of the Gospel of St. Luke for a penny one day, and said it cost only two cents, for he is excellent type and neatly bound. During the days of the persecution of Diocletian, many Christians surrendered their Bibles and the sacred vessels of worship, and in consequence lost their faith. When the Bible goes out of our lives, our Christian character loses its good support. A man once, in the presence of his family, picked up the Bible, turned its pages carelessly for a few moments, and petulantly threw it down upon the table, saying, "Pshaw! give me Shakespeare." Perhaps he never knew that the Bible was the acknowledged inspiration of the marvelous lines of Avon's greatest bard. It is certain no man ever prefers any other book who has discovered the extraordinary beauty and power of the Bible.

We must valiantly defend the Bible against irreverence. It is the very work of our civilization—the foundation of liberty and the cornerstone of truth. I submit whether we do not commit a serious offense against the sacredness of the Book when we include in constant jokes and puns based upon the Scriptures. It cannot be anything less than sinful sacrilege to weave the holy personages and incidents of Bible history into ridiculous story. The Bible does not suffer serious questions which confront the face, and do we not violate its sacred rights when we make it the basis of our fun and laughter? This is a popular desecration, which, like Uzzah's sin, has been committed so long that it has not occurred to many people that they are unintentionally undermining the very book which they desire most to defend.

The Sabbath is a sacred vessel. A divinely instituted day, for rest and worship and hope. We cannot spare the Sabbath, but we cannot keep it if it is steadily allowed to become more and more social and a business day. All vices and enemies of our nation thrive best where the first day of the week is decreasingly reverenced. Immoral parties and literary clubs are arranged for the Sabbath are direct attacks upon the sacredness of our republic. The perpetuity of a nation depends upon the reverence of the people. When the reverence of the people for the walls of the citadel crumble and the men who have been once respected, virtue and purity are disavowed, a nation's progress is lost, courage and spirit of sacrifice and heroism is speedily destroyed. God has put Himself on record as ready to come those nations to "ride upon the high places of the earth" who keep His holy Sabbaths. History fulfills in every century the declaration of Almighty which have rested upon those who have profaned the sacredness of holy day. Why do we argue the importance of the Sabbath in the presence of the ruins